



Week 3 Assignment: SIS Evaluation

Overview

This week you will evaluate your district's student information system. Use the document entitled **Evaluation of Your Local School District's Student Information System (SIS) Criteria and Directions**, which is included in this assignment, to help guide your work.

Rubric

Use the following rubric to guide your work.

| Tasks ↓ | Exemplary | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | |
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| Sources and Information | The student selects, consults with, and draws from appropriate and insightful information sources. (Max. of 5 pts) | The student selects, consults with and draws from, overly general information sources. (Max. of 3 pts) | The student selects, consults with, and draws from inappropriate information sources. (Max. of 1 pt) | No information sources. (0 points) |
| Justification of Opinion and Point of View | Opinion is shared and is supported with insightful, carefully selected details. (Max. of 5 pts) | Opinion is shared with marginal evidentiary support or explanation of thought. (Max. of 3 pts) | Personal statements are shared with no evidentiary support or explanation of thought. (Max. of 1 pt) | No personal statement. (0 points) |
| Complexity of Understanding and Inferring | Reflections and conclusions reached are insightful and perceptive. (Max. of 5 pts) | Reflections and conclusions reached are minimal and simplistic. (Max. of 3 pts) | Reflections and conclusions contain little or no personal insights. (Max. of 1 pt) | No reflection. No conclusion. (0 points) |
| Writing | The student generates writing that is highly relevant, appropriately specific, and clearly and completely stated. (Max. of 5 pts) | The student generates writing that is relevant and reasonably specific, but may not be clearly or completely stated. (Max. of 2 pts) | The student does not generate writing that is relevant, specific, clearly or completely stated. (Max. of 1 pt) | No writing. (0 points) |

Directions

For this week's assignment, you will evaluate and discuss your local school district's Student Information System (SIS). Your local school district employs a SIS which handles many of your district's needs involving the management, sharing, and reporting of student information. For this assignment, you may want to consult with your campus' SIS manager, district SIS managers, and other teachers who use the SIS. You will want to ensure that the sources you draw from are appropriate and insightful so you will be able to formulate an informed opinion. You may even draw from your personal experience (if relevant) with your district's SIS. These consultations will aid you in the evaluation of the efficacy of your district's SIS.

Before you begin, here are some factors to consider when evaluating your school district's Student Information System. The factors below will help guide your thinking:

- 1. Total cost of software ownership including reoccurring ongoing costs.** Many products have various tactics to appear inexpensive, yet have higher reoccurring or start up and configuration costs (i.e. software licenses, training, software maintenance and support).
- 2. Feature set.** What are the base features of the software, as well as the secondary features? Most school districts select a SIS with as many functions built into the system as possible. What functions does your school district's SIS serve?
- 3. Texas-specific functionality.** Texas is a unique state in that it requires many specific reports and assessments from its school districts. Items such as Texas-specific tests, and attendance reporting require school districts to provide pre-identification files and loading of test scores back into the system. How does your district's software provide a solution for these requirements by the state of Texas? Evaluate the software's ability to handle these processes.
- 4. Ease of use and reporting.** With the many data elements your school district is required by the state to track, users need to have an easy and intuitive solution to maximize productivity and use of their time. Staff resources can be overburdened by a product that is cumbersome to use. Is your school district's software user friendly, offering ease of navigation? Does the software ever require duplication of data entry?
- 5. Customer support and experience of the support staff.** Customer support and service is as important as the solution itself. During the evaluation of your school district's software, you will need to assess the types of support available: e-mail, telephone, Web and the vendor's commitment to quality of support. Does the vendor provide timely support with useful answers?
- 6. Thorough training in the software system.** Are your school district's users adequately trained in the proper use of the software system? In order to ensure that the use of the SIS is successful, all users need to be properly trained on the product. Are your school district's users trained through the district, through the vendor, or both? Were you trained in you district's SIS? If so, was the training adequate, and thorough? Additionally, there should also be a component available for ongoing training.

Fill out the chart included in this assignment with the information you learn about your district's SIS.

This assignment is due no later than 11:59 p.m. on the seventh day of Week 3.

Workspace

Fill out the chart below to complete this assignment. Be sure to address all the items listed on the previous page. The boxes will expand as you type.

Student Information System Evaluation Chart

| Areas To Address | Your Findings and Evaluation |
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| <p>Total Cost of Software Ownership (including reoccurring and ongoing costs)</p> | <p>La Vernia ISD uses the RSCCC (Regional Service Center Computer Cooperative) Business and Student Information System. RSCCC was originally developed by the Region 20 ESC (Educational Service Center) in San Antonio, Texas, but is now widely available throughout the state and supported by many other ESCs.</p> <p>As Technology Director, I was directly involved with my Superintendent, principals and Business Manager in evaluating various SISs (Student Information Systems). We have stayed with RSCCC for many years due to a combination of low TCO (Total Cost of Ownership), ease of use, excellent vendor support and high compliance with PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) and other Texas-specific reporting requirements. In fact, alignment to PEIMS was our foremost evaluation criteria when choosing a student information system; as a small district with limited resources, it is critical that PEIMS data reporting be as easy and painless as possible, and RSCCC far outperformed its competitors in this regard. I had personal experience in another district with a competing product designed by a major education vendor; although many of the features were great, PEIMS was awful, and PEIMS updates were often delivered just hours or days before the reporting cycle deadline, leading to major headaches and frustration. It is my opinion that for a student information system to be successful in Texas, it must excel at PEIMS. It is also important to note that there are no additional costs to our district when PEIMS or other federal or state mandates or reporting requirements change; ongoing compliance updates are included as a standard feature of RSCCC.</p> <p>From a cost perspective, Region 20 offered LVISD the opportunity to be a beta-test site for the current version of the software, affording an opportunity for both additional initial support at no extra cost and the opportunity to provide direct input on program features and operation. This beta-test relationship allowed the creation of an almost customized student information system at a fraction of the cost of any competing system.</p> <p>RSCCC, including all software modules, training, updates and any required client/server SQL software costs LVISD about \$12,000 per year. This price is comparable to or below most competing products we reviewed, and having the support of our local Region 20 ESC to back up the product is priceless. Initial buy in costs were no higher than our yearly renewal costs, and data conversion was included. The only option that increases our ongoing costs would be when LVISD purchases additional days of training at \$600 per day; however, our current product knowledge base and our cadre of experienced personnel typically makes this cost unnecessary.</p> <p>There are, of course, ongoing costs for LVISD personnel to update and maintain</p> |

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| | <p>the software, including ensuring sufficient off-site backups exist for disaster recovery, but these costs would exist no matter what system we used and are not unique to the RSCCC system.</p> <p>While discussing TCO, it should be noted that LVISD will soon phase out GradeSpeed, a third-party parent portal student grading and attendance product, in favor of RSCCC's included online parent portal and grade book. This will save the district the \$5,500 annual cost of GradeSpeed licensing, as well as the associated support costs incurred when maintaining and synchronizing two disparate systems.</p> |
| Software Features Set | <p>The RSCCC software handles all aspects of our business and student information management needs. As noted on the Region 20 RSCCC website at http://portal.esc20.net/portal/page/portal/TCC/RSCCC RSCCC includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatic system updates for meeting changing state and federal mandates • Statewide network support • Data access using ODBC (Open Database Connectivity) compliant software • PEIMS compliance for reporting required data to the Texas Education Agency • A Web-based teacher grade book and parent portal for student schedules, assignments, attendance, and grades <p>RSCCC is a real-time, enterprise-level relational database system which includes the ability to interface to our transportation software (TransFinder), food services software (NutriKids) and student performance data analysis software (AEIS-IT) through automated ODBC import/export cycles. Although RSCCC is being replaced by a fully web-based product within the next 12 months, the current RSCCC system we use is a hybrid, with on-site access based on the client/server model using a Sybase SQL server, and a web-based portal allowing parental access to student attendance and progress information.</p> <p>The list of functions/modules provided to LVISD as part of the RSCCC system includes Accounts Receivable, Asset Management, Attendance, Budget, Discipline, Finance, Grade Reporting, Human Resources, PEIMS, Registration, Requisition, Scheduling, Security Administration, SHARE (student health information), Special Education Program, Test Scores and the web-based Parent Portal for Student Progress and Attendance Information.</p> <p>RSCCC also embodies an automated update system in which new revisions of the client software are automatically pushed out to and installed on the user workstations without the need for technology personnel to intervene. This feature will become obsolete when the new, fully web-based version is available, as all software will reside on a centralized web server cluster facilitating ease of updating. Both the new web-based system and the current version also include automated nightly backups of all data to a secure location so that data is not lost due to user errors, server failures or other catastrophic events. In the unlikely event of data file corruption, database rebuilding tools as well as live technical assistance from Region 20 help prevent permanent loss of data.</p> |
| Texas-specific | <p>One of the primary reasons LVISD chose the RSCCC software is due to its high level of compliance with the Texas PEIMS reporting standards. RSCCC also</p> |

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| Functionality | <p>features native integrated support for TREx (Texas Records Exchange), the system that allows schools to transmit student entry, withdrawal and transfer records to each other and to TEA (Texas Education Agency) for use in tracking student leaver and dropout information. Each LEA (Local Education Agency) is responsible for the follow-up required to insure that students who withdraw from any school are going to another school or to home schooling; otherwise, the student is counted as a dropout and that hurts the LEA on the AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System) accountability reports including the School Report Card.</p> <p>As Region 20 notes regarding Texas-specific functionality and compliance with mandates on their website at http://portal.esc20.net/portal/page/portal/TCCC/RSCCC/Features%20Compliance%20with%20Mandates, "...the RSCCC system meets all state and federal requirements for reporting and record maintenance. This includes using data edits that are consistent with PEIMS data standards. Software updates are automatically made as mandates change. These are done at no additional cost to the district."</p> <p>The RSCCC product benefits from the unique working relationship between TEA and the regional service centers; there is constant communication with TEA regarding changes to federal or state attendance laws, reporting requirements, test scores and identification standards, often well before the changes take effect, allowing the service center to provide timely updates to RSCCC so that we as a district are never struggling to accommodate last minute changes or submitting improperly formatted information through PEIMS. This is a key benefit of the RSCCC system; it is like having insider information on what is coming down the regulatory pike so that we do not waste time playing catch-up or needlessly reformatting and resubmitting reports to the educational agencies.</p> |
| Ease of Use and Reporting | <p>RSCCC is easy to use; it uses standard Microsoft Windows GUI (Graphical User Interface) operational elements and functionality, and is intuitively laid out. Most response boxes in the various screens and modules use drop-down menus to facilitate the choice of standard responses or options, improving ease-of-use and enhancing data integrity.</p> <p>RSCCC provides a wide selection of both traditional campus and district reports and reports required by Texas and the federal government such as NCLB (No Child Left Behind) reports. All modules provide customized query-based reports, and use WYSIWYG (What You See is What You Get) printing to so that onscreen and printed reports are identical. Data and reports can also be exported in a variety of formats to popular spreadsheet and graphics software to facilitate extended reporting and data mining capabilities.</p> <p>Classroom teachers have an intuitively organized module designed to mimic a grade book that facilitates student grade and attendance information reporting. Student demographics data is derived from the scheduling module, and is used to pre-populate forms and reports for teachers. Each grading period, teachers find a ready-made, pre-populated grid so that all they have to do is input their unique assignment and testing information and grading criteria.</p> <p>Needless duplication of data is minimized because the RSCCC system can easily import/export data to our various internal and external district data applications such as TransFinder or NutriKids, eliminating both the loss of time as well as the inaccuracy caused when data is entered independently into multiple</p> |

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| | <p>systems. Data errors can frequently result if addresses or identification numbers are mistyped in other systems, or when one operator keys in a name in all upper-case letters as opposed to leading-caps style, so maintaining a single master database system is essential to ease of use and accuracy.</p> |
| Customer Support and Experience of the Support Staff | <p>The Region 20 ESC provides outstanding support for RSCCC. Most of the Region 20 support and training staff are former educators who used RSCCC in Texas schools before joining Region 20, so they are very knowledgeable not only in the operation of their software but also in the operations of Texas schools. The programmers or other support staff who are not former educators themselves are well indoctrinated into the education environment by their peers, and as the regional service centers exist specifically to service Texas schools, this gives their personnel a distinctive level of camaraderie and a familiarity with our staff and schools that private-sector vendors generally do not share.</p> <p>LVISD has procedures in place regarding the reporting of support incidents. Although Region 20 staff are readily available, we prefer to handle support in-house when possible. Campus data clerks and other users contact designated staff in the LVISD technology or business departments based on the nature of their issue, and those staff members then contact Region 20 as needed. This procedure ensures consistency of support, and often enables the district to send out helpful information or corrective procedures preemptively to minimize user frustration.</p> <p>Support from Region 20 is provided for the RSCCC product in a variety of methods, including email, telephone, web-based remote control sessions as well as via documents and updates posted on secure FTP sites. If data corruption is suspected, our data can be securely posted on an FTP site for review by Region 20 personnel; they can repair the data and post the fixed files for download and reinstallation within hours, so support for both major and minor issues is readily available and timely.</p> <p>Region 20 provides expert support and is able to escalate LVISD support issues as needed to the appropriate personnel so that we do not waste our time with useless answers, offshore phone support or inaccurate instructions. Additional support opportunities are also provided by local and regional support groups made up of other schools and districts to facilitate the sharing of both operational tips and best practices.</p> |
| Thorough User Training in the Software System | <p>LVISD originally sent all business personnel, appropriate technology personnel (including myself as the Technology Director) and our campus and district-level data clerks through a total of five days of training on RSCCC at the Region 20 ESC. As the Technology Director, I also received additional training on the proper installation of the software on our network as well as ongoing maintenance and data integrity procedures. This provided a good foundation when RSCCC was first implemented over a decade ago; follow-up support is performed by Region 20 staff during monthly site visits to all campuses and offices, along with additional training on changing PEIMS or state or federal requirements as needed.</p> <p>New personnel are sent through training at Region 20 as/if needed, but we also use train-the-trainer mentoring models in which existing staff assist the newbies until they are up to speed on the system and our procedures. It has been our experience that although vendor training on the proper use of the software is critical, we have to do significantly more initial and ongoing in-house training on</p> |

district procedures and data standards. It is crucial that data clerks perform tasks consistently across the campuses so that we do not have mismatched or incomplete data. Also, we spend time reiterating the importance of timely data entry, which is essential to insure all data is entered promptly so that reports run by campus or district administrators are accessing the most recent, up-to-date data.

Teachers who use RSCCC for attendance or grade reporting are typically trained and mentored by their peers in the use of the software and all related procedures and deadlines. Timely data entry of student progress and attendance information by our teachers is essential now that parents have the ability to view this information online.

Office managers and others who produce requisitions or handle budgeting are trained as needed in their specific functions, and again, mentoring by their peers provides a substantial portion of their training. Generally speaking, each user is trained only in the portions of the RSCCC system that they need to access based on their job requirements. Only a few high-level administrative users, including myself as the Technology Director, have received training on the entire RSCCC system.

Ongoing training is also offered in the form of workshops which Region 20 provides to keep users abreast of changes in PEIMS standards, TREx records exchange standards and procedures, and legislative changes that alter or refine data reporting requirements and/or data standards. Overall, training is readily available and of a sufficient caliber that all pertinent district staff know how to properly use RSCCC. This fact is verified by Laura Ramzinski, Director of Finance and PEIMS for LVISD: "We see few errors attributable to a lack of training on system operation; most often, errors are caused by staff members who fail to follow our procedures or data standards. When that happens, we provide [the staff member] additional training on our data standards and procedures."